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## THE EARLY PROPAGANDIST MOVEMENT IN ENGLISH POPULATION THEORY

JAMES A. FIELD

Notoriously, the birth-rate in countries of our civilization has for years been falling. Notoriously, too, a chief factor in this decline of the birth-rate has been the spread of so-called neo-Malthusian practices which render the fertility of marriage almost completely subject to voluntary control. The wide extent of these practices is not always recognized, and can be only vaguely known; but in proportion to the adequacy of our information we must acknowledge that a sudden substitution of rational calculation for instinct as the influence determining human increase constituted, for good or for ill, one of the profoundest social changes of the last century. Despite its importance, the history of the movement has remained obscure.

In countries where the English language is read and spoken the general diffusion of neo-Malthusian ideas is commonly traced back to the noisy publicity of the prosecutions which were carried on in England in the years from 1876 to 1878, culminating in the trials of Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, and of Edward Truelove, charged with offending against public morals by offering for sale Dr. Knowlton's book, "The Fruits of Philosophy." But this book and others of similar purport, which like it were effectually advertised by the scandal of the trial, had been first published decades before the ill-judged attempt to suppress them. The checks to population which they advocated were not newly devised. It is abundantly clear that the precursors of the neo-Malthusian movement established an active propaganda in England in the decade of the 1820's, when, after the shock of the industrial revolution, the shattering idealism of the Revolution in France, and the burden of the French war, the British populace was straining in so many ways to fit itself to its new economic situation.

The present paper is an attempt to give an account of the beginnings of such propagandism in England. It is only a fragment: a tentative study of one episode in the development of population theory since Malthus. The source from which it has been chiefly derived is the unique and invaluable collection of

manuscript records, newspaper clippings, and fugitive printed matter gathered by Francis Place. This material, though unfortunately somewhat scattered, has found its way partly to the library of Professor Seligman, but principally to the British Museum, where it fills some two hundred and fifty bulky volumes, and comprises references to nearly every social problem which was stirring in the early nineteenth century. Buried in the mass, almost unknown, are documents revealing contemporary efforts to promote the use of artificial means for the restriction of births. Half revealing, one might better say, for apprehension of public censure has from the first operated to keep the record obscure. The narrative based upon such documents as are at hand will doubtless require amplification, and perhaps considerable correction, by the results of further study; but provisional as it is, I venture to lay it before you in the hope that it may shed new light on the beginnings of our present-day problem of the declining birth-rate.

When Malthus published, in 1803, the second edition of his "Essay", he made a most important departure from his former classification of the checks by introducing, expressly and with new emphasis, the concept of moral restraint. The first "Essay" had depicted the menace of population for purposes of destructive argument: the second took the form of a treatise on population by and for itself; and so, in revising the work, Malthus was moved to indicate not only the difficulties of the situation which he saw, but also his hope of a way out. This hope, such as it was, lay in moral restraint. By moral restraint Malthus meant, as he expressly stated in the last edition of the "Essay" published during his lifetime, "a restraint from marriage, from prudential motives, with a conduct strictly moral during the period of restraint." From this meaning, he insisted, he had never intentionally deviated.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of restraint *in* the marriage relation was in fact foreign to Malthus' doctrine. He warmly repudiated the allegation that he advocated anything of the sort. The usage which has connected his name with neo-Malthusianism and its devices is therefore but an example of the irony which the course of scientific thinking has in store for those whose influence proves too far-reaching to remain within the limits of their own mental

<sup>1</sup> Sixth Edition, London, 1826, Vol. i, p. 15, note.

horizons. Malthus' spirit of reform stopped at the threshold of marriage. He was radical enough in interposing difficulties between the desire to marry and actual marriage; but once persons were married he left them to the undisturbed guidance of the ethical sanctions which religion and custom had provided. However inharmonious and illogical some elements of the traditional idea of the marriage relation might have seemed if tested by his criterion of utility, he did not call them into question. The advocates of the radical check see in this a failure to carry his principle to its logical and serviceable conclusion. This, in the words of Meyerhof, was the mythological cuckoo's egg in the nest of exact science.<sup>2</sup> But it may well be that Malthus was wiser than the unconsidering fanatics among the prophets of population reform who fling their upstart logic in the face of established social customs.

From other quarters the proposal of more direct checks on population was not long in forthcoming. Guardedly it found a way into the *Encyclopedia Britannica Supplement*, in James Mill's article "Colony", published in 1818. There Mill wrote, in an often-cited passage concerning "the best means of checking the progress of population":

And yet, if the superstitions of the nursery were discarded, and the principle of utility kept steadily in view, a solution might not be very difficult to be found; and the means of drying up one of the most copious sources of human evil . . . might be seen to be neither doubtful nor difficult to be applied.

Three years later, in the first edition of his "Elements of Political Economy", Mill, treating of population, speaks of

. . . prudence; by which, either marriages are sparingly contracted, or care is taken that children, beyond a certain number, shall not be the fruit.<sup>3</sup>

And in the same work he concludes:

The grand practical problem, therefore, is, to find the means of limiting the number of births.<sup>4</sup>

The *Edinburgh Review* ventured more than a hint in the same direction.<sup>5</sup> Thompson, in 1824,<sup>6</sup> advocated some sort of preventive artifice. But a more outspoken declaration had in the meantime

<sup>2</sup> "Hans Ferdy", *Sittliche Selbstbeschränkung*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Page 34.

<sup>4</sup> Page 51.

<sup>5</sup> In a review of Cobbett's *Cottage Economy* [by Jeffrey], vol. xxxviii, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> *An Inquiry into the Distribution of Wealth*, pp. 547-50.

come from Francis Place. In his "Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population", published in 1822, reviewing various ways in which the evils of excessive population might be mitigated, he delivers this noteworthy pronouncement:

If, above all, it were once clearly understood, that it was not disreputable for married persons to avail themselves of such precautionary means as would, without being injurious to health, or destructive of female delicacy, prevent conception, a sufficient check might at once be given to the increase of population beyond the means of subsistence; vice and misery, to a prodigious extent, might be removed from society, and the object of Mr. Malthus, Mr. Godwin, and of every philanthropic person, be promoted, by the increase of comfort, of intelligence, and of moral conduct, in the mass of the population.

And Place adds prophetically:

The course recommended will, I am fully persuaded, at some period be pursued by the people, even if left to themselves.<sup>7</sup>

But the people were not left to themselves. By the following year an active propaganda had already begun.

One evening in July, 1823, a mysterious parcel was handed to Mr. Taylor, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, with a note asking that he be so kind as to see that it was delivered to Mrs. Mary Fildes—known for her interest in the welfare of the working classes. With this request Mr. Taylor complied. When Mrs. Fildes opened the package she found a number of copies of what was subsequently called "the diabolical handbill": a small leaflet, unobtrusively and almost elegantly printed, addressed "To the Married of Both Sexes", setting forth the economic burden of an excessively large family, and describing with frank simplicity means of preventing conception. With the leaflets was an anonymous note which ran as follows:

London July 8th 1823

To Mrs. Fildes

Madam

The Bills enclosed with this note are sent to you, as to an experienced, sensible, discreet woman, having much influence in her neighbourhood, to one, who has shewn herself the ardent friend of the working people. You Madam must be well aware, that numberless evils are produced by too large a family, not only as it makes the working man & his wife poor, but breaks their spirits, & qualifies them to be ill used & trampled upon by those who are richer.—If you will give one of the Bills to each of such married women as in your opinion may be usefull you will confer on them a great benefit. The

<sup>7</sup> Page 165.

method recommended is getting fast into use amongst the working people in London, & will in a very few years produce the happiest consequences . . . . Mr. Carliles people know nothing of the contents of the parcel, but should you be pleased to notice it, have the goodness to direct to Mr. James at Mr. Carliles No. 5 Water Lane Fleet Street London the letter will be called for, any number of bills you may desire to have shall be sent to you

by a sincere well wisher  
to the working Classes.<sup>8</sup>

It is stated that Mrs. Fildes ultimately became an advocate of the practice thus suddenly brought to her notice.<sup>9</sup> At first however, outraged and indignant, and unable to fix the responsibility on Mr. Taylor,<sup>10</sup> she reported the happening to the Attorney General. Six weeks later, having received no answer, she addressed herself to Richard Carlile, who, for his zealous efforts to establish the freedom of the press, was at that time in Dorchester Gaol, in his characteristic state of imprisonment. Her letter, which begins with a brief narrative of the episode of the handbills, and an outcry against the indignity she had suffered, concludes thus:

. . . I feel indignant at the insult which has been offered me; Is it possible that this infamous handBill has issued from the encouragers of the doctrines of the cold blooded Malthus or [his] servile supporter the detestable Lawyer Scarlett?

I have no redress but what is afforded me through the medium of a free press; I submit this infamous transaction to you under a hope that you will give it that consideration which (I think) so flagrant an attack upon the morals of the community demands; hoping that you will expose the propagators of this infamous hand Bill

I am Sir

yours very Respfy

Mary Fildes<sup>11</sup>

The story of the handbills was given publicity through Wooler's paper *The Black Dwarf*. Wooler did not approve the principle of the handbill; but inasmuch as he conceived that it was his function to insure the open discussion of topics which were in

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Mary Fildes to "Mr. Richard Carlile, Dorchester Gaol. . ." Place Papers, British Museum (Hendon), vol. 68. [Place's "guard-books," containing for the most part newspaper clippings, are kept at the Hendon storage building of the British Museum newspaper room. Reference to these volumes in subsequent notes of this article will be made in abbreviated form: e. g. "vol. 68, Hendon."]

<sup>9</sup> G. J. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. i, p. 130; and *The Republican*, xi, p. 561.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Black Dwarf*, xi, 461-464; J. E. Taylor, *To the Public* (1823).

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Carlile, as cited above.

danger of being suppressed, he published Mrs. Fildes' letter and also reprinted the contents of the handbill itself, with the anonymous note which Mrs. Fildes had found in the package.<sup>12</sup>

The authorship of these strange leaflets naturally became a matter of curious speculation. A pamphlet on "The History of the Diabolical Hand Bill" was issued in Manchester, championing the cause of Mrs. Fildes,<sup>13</sup> and presenting a circumstantial narrative of the facts in the case with more or less obvious bias of hostility to Mr. Taylor. He, however, had succeeded in disclaiming responsibility in a letter to the *Black Dwarf*,<sup>14</sup> which he subsequently republished, together with other correspondence, in a leaflet addressed "To The Public."<sup>15</sup> Far more important, therefore, were allegations which ascribed the handbill to Robert Owen, the philanthropist-reformer of New Lanark.

The first public reference to Owen in this connection occurs in the *Black Dwarf* of October 1, 1823, to which one James Macphail communicated the following extract from an anonymous letter which had been received by the editor of the *Labourer's Friend*:

You, I am sure, will give that truly benevolent man, Mr. Robert Owen, credit for good intentions, whatever opinion you may entertain of me, as an unknown correspondent. I will therefore relate an anecdote respecting him. It was objected to his plan that the number of children which would be produced in his communities would be so great, and the deaths from vices, misery, and bad management, so few, that the period of doubling the number of people would be very short, and that consequently in no very long period his whole plan would become abortive. Mr. Owen felt the force of this objection, and sought the means of averting the consequences. He heard of the small number of children in French families compared with English families. He knew from authentic sources that the peasantry in the South of France limited the number of their progeny. He knew that while our unfortunate countrymen were reduced to pauperism, and to six shillings a week wages, the peasants in the South of France received 2s. 6d. a day,

<sup>12</sup> *Black Dwarf*, vol. xi, pp. 404-411; Sept. 17, 1823. For Wooler's attitude, cf. Taylor, *To the Public*.

<sup>13</sup> *The History of the Diabolical Hand Bill, for checking Population; With the various Correspondence which has taken place, on this subject with Mrs. Fildes, Mr. J. E. Taylor, The Attorney General, Mr. Wooler, and Mr. Carile, With an interesting Statement from the latter respecting Mr. R. Owen, the Lanark philanthropist!! With observations by A. Clark.*

Manchester: Published and sold by T. Crabtree. 1823.

<sup>14</sup> Vol. xi, pp. 461-464.

<sup>15</sup> "Printed at the Guardian Office, Manchester," and dated Oct. 8, 1823.

which in their fine climate, and with their abstemious habits, enabled them to live in the most comfortable manner. He knew that these people were cleanly, simple and well provided with everything desirable in abundance, and he knew also that they married young. Mr. Owen resolved to ascertain the means by which this desirable state was produced and maintained. He went to France, discovered the means which prevents too rapid a population, and he brought back with him several [specimens of the contrivance there in use], two of which he gave to his friend who had been the cause of this inquiry. Mr. Owen no longer feared a too rapid increase of the people in his communities; he saw at once what to him was most desirable, the means of marrying all his people at an early age, and limiting their progeny to any desirable extent. Ask him, and he will acknowledge what is here asserted. Do not then condemn this virtuous man to punishment here and hereafter, because he entertains opinions which you call abominable. What Mr. Owen saw would be the greatest of all evils in his communities, is the greatest of all evils in the great community of this nation; and is tenfold increased in the community which composes the Irish people.

The source of this surprising statement is hardly less interesting than its unequivocal character. Almost certainly it emanated from no less an authority than Francis Place. For among Place's manuscript copies of correspondence are to be found drafts or transcripts of the letters to the editor of the *Labourer's Friend*, from one of which Macphail had extracted the Owen anecdote. With them is the manuscript of an anonymous letter to the *Black Dwarf*, explaining, as Macphail had not deigned to explain, the purpose of the anecdote in its original context.<sup>16</sup> The details of the anecdote are essentially repeated, if not confirmed, in Carlile's letter to Mrs. Fildes, printed in "The History of the Diabolical Hand Bill." Impliedly, the story had come to Carlile's knowledge some time before. But the strongest testimony to its authenticity comes from the reflection that Place was through his friendship with Owen and through his position in the propaganda preëminently likely to know the facts of which he spoke.

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<sup>16</sup> A portion of Place's anonymous letter was printed in the *Black Dwarf*, of October 8 (vol. xi, pp. 505-8).

It is true of course that copies of unsigned letters are not in themselves absolutely conclusive of the authorship. Every indication, however, marks these letters as the work of Place. The omission or modification of certain passages makes it clear that the Place copies were not taken from the printed version. There is no reason to regard them as the work of any person but Place.



Such allegations contrast strangely with the prevailing view of Owen's biographers,<sup>17</sup> strongly supported by his own writings—the view that he denied the Malthusian principle of excessive pressure of population against the limits of subsistence. Possibly the secret knowledge that stringent preventive checks were in use at New Lanark, if such really was the case, made it easier to assert that overpopulation need not be feared by the social reformer. Possibly there is significance in the statement of Malthus, first published in the fifth edition of the "Essay" in 1817, that Owen was "fully sensible" of the difficulties which must be experienced from the principle of population in any attempted state of equality of possessions; and that, although he had "in consequence taxed his ingenuity to the utmost to invent some mode" of evading the difficulty, he had only demonstrated his "absolute inability to suggest any mode of accomplishing this object that is not unnatural, immoral, or cruel in a high degree."<sup>18</sup> One contemporary professed to believe that the controversy between the Rev. Mr. Menzies and Robert Owen touching sexual morality at New Lanark was a sign that the French check had been put into operation there.<sup>19</sup> It is certainly true that Owen traveled in France in 1818. During his further journey through Switzerland he records<sup>20</sup> a "mutually interesting" conversation with Sismondi, whose "*Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*", published in 1819, contained—though perhaps by mere coincidence—a remarkable chapter on the moral duty of continuing prudential restraint after marriage. Owen's own son was later the author of a book prominent in the literature of neo-Malthusianism; and his book was in due course announced in the pages of *The Crisis*, of which father and son were joint editors.<sup>21</sup>

The *Black Dwarf*, in making public Macphail's communication, had remarked that the charge seemed "to require a contradiction from Mr. Owen, if it be untrue."<sup>22</sup> The contradiction never came. Holyoake is satisfied, on this ground, that Owen was the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Holyoake, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. i, p. 131; *Dictionary of National Biography*; Podmore, *Robert Owen*, vol. i, p. 225 note; as well as Owen's autobiography and other writings.

<sup>18</sup> Bk. III, ch. iii.

<sup>19</sup> *History of the Diabolical Handbill*, pp. 13-14. Cf. *Black Dwarf*, vol. xi, p. 437.

<sup>20</sup> In his *Life*, vol. i, p. 173.

<sup>21</sup> In the issue for October 27, 1832, and the following issue.

<sup>22</sup> Vol. xi, p. 499.

author of the handbill.<sup>23</sup> The evidence does indeed go far to establish Owen's approval of the methods which the bill described; but more is not proven. For plainly, if he favored the principle, any attempt on his part to deny that he had so promulgated it would have been hazardous and probably futile.

Search elsewhere for the authorship of the handbills gains a clue in the allusion to Owen's "friend who had been the cause of this enquiry." By friendship and by professed opinion either James Mill or Place was qualified to have played this part. Place was Owen's friend; Place had urged that excessive population would prove the undoing of the New Lanark experiment;<sup>24</sup> and Place it was who, by his anonymous letter, was showing himself familiar with Owen's alleged action. That Place was a most active and persistent circulator of the literature of the new check will presently be shown. Was he perhaps the author of the Diabolical Handbill?

Among Place's papers the handbill is to be found in three forms: the form which was sent to Mrs. Fildes, and two others, apparently later differentiations of the original,<sup>25</sup> and headed, respectively: "To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People", and "To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life." On these no name appears; though it was Place's custom to indicate the authorship of the documents he preserved. In addition to the printed handbills there is a manuscript of another bill "To the mature reader of both sexes."<sup>26</sup> The handwriting is unlike that of Place; the ink is of a kind which he did not ordinarily use; the subject matter is pervaded by a naïve physiology, with almost no appeal to economics. Below, as if supplied by Place, is the name Benjamin Aimé. The Triennial Directory of London for 1822 lists Benjamin Aime (without the accent) as a musical instrument maker of 3 Panton street, Haymarket. Whether or not Benjamin Aimé was the author of this draft, his connection with the handbills actually printed is doubtful.

Two allusions to the authorship of the bill occur in Place's letters. On July 12, 1823,—four days later than the date of the note sent to Mrs. Fildes—Place wrote anonymously to the

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<sup>23</sup> *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, vol. i, p. 130.

<sup>24</sup> See, e. g., a letter to Thomas Hodgskin, dated Sept. 8, 1819. British Museum, Additional MSS. 35,153, ff. 68-72.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *The Republican*, xi, p. 561.

<sup>26</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

editor of *The Labourer's Friend*,<sup>27</sup> arguing that the means of improving the condition of the laboring classes was restriction of population according to the "method recommended in the bill inclosed with this." "The bill", he added, "is not exactly such an one as I should bestow unqualified approbation upon, but [is] such as I have received<sup>28</sup> it, and as such I send it." Another letter in Place's handwriting and manner, unsigned, unaddressed, and undated, but most probably written in 1824,<sup>29</sup> contains the statement: "In order to do my part towards . . . . restoring a more prosperous and happier state of society, I have caused to be printed and have forwarded to you some bills . . . ." <sup>30</sup> Such evidence as is given us by these two letters is therefore at first sight contradictory. The wording of the earlier letter, however, may be not so much a denial of authorship as an evasion of responsibility, not surprising at a time when the propaganda was newly feeling its way. The later letter does not rule out the possibility that Place, instead of having himself written the handbill, may have "caused it to be" written as well as printed.

The two statements might be reconciled, though each were accepted in its most obvious meaning, if it were assumed that they referred to different forms of the bill and that these were the work of different persons. Probably they did in fact refer to different forms of the bill. The first letter is known to have transmitted the same bill which had been sent four days previously to Mrs. Fildes:<sup>31</sup> the conjectural date of the second would rather correspond with the period of the revised versions. The suggestion that the revision was performed by a new hand receives some support from internal evidence. Place's workmanship is unquestionably less apparent in the original handbill than in the adaptations for the genteel and for the working people, which manifest, not only in their general argument but in idiosyncracies of word and phrase, a striking resemblance to his authentic writings. Opposed to this hypothesis is the testimony of contemporary

<sup>27</sup> Included in the communication to the *Black Dwarf* of Oct. 1, 1823. Place papers, Hendon, vol. 68.

<sup>28</sup> This crucial word "received" is obscurely written, but careful comparison with other occurrences of the same word justifies the reading given.

<sup>29</sup> This date is suggested by a reference to a report to Parliament on parish conditions of pauperism, and a resemblance to the letters referred to below, p. 223.

<sup>30</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>31</sup> *Black Dwarf*, vol. xi, p. 500.

judgment. Cobbett found "that there were *three* separate productions of this sort all proceeding from the same source"; and Carlile, after four years of correspondence with Place, reprinted all three handbills with the admission that he knew "whence these papers emanate."<sup>32</sup> If the several forms had a common authorship it is more likely that Place wrote all than that he wrote none.

Geographically, too, the trail of the handbill leads toward Place. The propagandist literature emanated, according to all the evidence at hand, from some person or persons in London. In the Benjamin Aimé manuscript for instance, one reads that "some respectable persons in the metropolis of this country, . . . have enquired after a means which is here unfolded." The handbill, in its earlier days, circulated among the Spitalfields weavers.<sup>33</sup> Cobbett, attacking it, remarks: "I have been told, and I *believe*, that it was *printed for one of the Rump*"<sup>34</sup>—that is to say, the "Westminster Rump", the radical political group dominated by Place. Mrs. Fildes' package had seemingly come to Manchester from London. The note within the package was dated in London, and mentioned the rapid spread in London of the check it recommended. Indeed the evidence of this note is perhaps more specific still; for its language suggests that it was written by Place,<sup>35</sup> and Mrs. Fildes' letter to Carlile, protesting against it and against the leaflets which accompanied it, is to be found among the papers of the Place collection.<sup>36</sup>

Others of the Place papers serve to mark their collector as one peculiarly associated with the handbill and its doctrine. A remarkable communication in a laboriously disguised hand, without definite address, tacitly addresses itself to "The author of the scheme for propagating by the secret distribution of printed papers the knowledge of the means to be used for preventing conception . . . ."<sup>37</sup> An anonymous, illiterate appeal to Carlile for information about the method of prevention is here, as if referred

<sup>32</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, April 15, 1826, vol. lviii, column 137. *Every Woman's Book*, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Carlile, in the *History of the Diabolical Hand Bill*.

<sup>34</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, vol. liv, column 108.

<sup>35</sup> It is however recorded that a certain guest of Mr. Taylor, whose name is not mentioned, failed to recognize the handwriting of any of the "London Radicals" in the note asking Mr. Taylor to deliver the parcel. Cf. *Black Dwarf*, xi, 462.

<sup>36</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>37</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

to the source of information.<sup>38</sup> Especially interesting is a journalistic tilt between the editors of two working-class periodicals of the time. *The Trades' Newspaper and Mechanics' Weekly Journal* of August 27, 1825, had denounced, as violations of public decency, "certain 'detestably wicked practices' recommended for the adoption of the working classes, by a class of political meddlers who call themselves Political Economists. . . ."<sup>39</sup> The *Artizan's London and Provincial Chronicle*, on September 4, replied, with more of loyalty than of judgment:

It would be idle affectation not to appear to understand at whom this assassinely paragraph is levelled! It is a *rival* of the vengeful EDITOR; the author of a volume printed in 1822, entitled "*Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*;" a work in the highest degree calculated to improve the condition of the working classes. . . .

A week later the vengeful editor rejoined as follows:

How far *Mr. Journeyman* is in the right in claiming for his friend and correspondent, the credit of advocating those detestable practices which we have denounced, will depend on the answers which he may be able to give to the following queries:—

Is the author of the "*Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*," published in 1822, the author also of a small hand-bill, entitled, "A MATRIMONIAL INDEX to the POPULATION TABLES, shewing at one glance, the State of the existing Supply and Demand for Labourers," and which being too small for sale, and designed besides for extensive circulation among the poorest of the community, was distributed gratuitously in the form of wrappers to farthing candles, and half ounces of snuff?

Is the author of the "*Illustrations and Proofs*," the author also of a "*MARRYING MADE HARMLESS*, a Dialogue between Frank and Sally, Two Servants out of Place," price 2d. or 10s. per hundred [?]

Is the author of the "*Illustrations and Proofs*" the author also of a short paper which appeared in one of the last numbers of Mr. Wooler's paper, pointing out in plain enough terms certain French methods of having only as many children as you please; and which paper was printed in a separate form for more general circulation?

Is the author of the "*Illustration[s] and Proofs*," the author also of a letter which appeared but the other day in the *Morning Chronicle*, on "*PROFITS AND WAGES*," in which the writer is pleased to say, that "it is worse than useless, it is exceedingly pernicious to lead any body to suppose that ANY THING SHORT OF A REDUCTION IN THE NUMBER of the people can procure them good wages," and that there is "by far too much *squeamishness* amongst us," as to the means of effecting that reduction?

Was it the author of the "*Illustrations and Proofs*," who employed

<sup>38</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>39</sup> This summary statement is from the *Trades' Newspaper* of Sept. 11.

certain young gentlemen (only think of employing *young* gentlemen on such a mission) to hand about at market time among the wives and daughters of mechanics and tradesmen, copies of one or other of the productions aforesaid, and which young gentlemen were, for their pains, dragged by an indignant crowd before a Magistrate, and held to bail, (though by some well-understood manoeuvring, never brought to trial) for the misdemeanour?

If *Mr. Journeyman* can reply in the *negative* to every one of these queries—if the author of “The Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population” is the author of none of the aforesaid productions, and has had no hand whatever in promoting the circulation of all or any of them, then all we have to say is, that *Mr. Journeyman* has done him great injustice in supposing that he is the individual at whom our paragraph was levelled. He has clapped a hat on his correspondent which does not belong to him.<sup>40</sup>

In view of all the evidence here presented, and until more conclusive evidence is forthcoming, we may adopt the working hypothesis that the Diabolical Handbill in its original form was written possibly by Robert Owen, but more probably by Place or some other person within the circle of Place’s connection; and that the bills addressed respectively to the Working People and to those in Genteel Life were probably later versions by Place himself.

Whatever doubt enshrouds the relation of Place to the handbills, his persistent and zealous efforts in the dissemination of the views they expressed are clear beyond question. Such a career of propagandism was quite in character with Place’s enthusiasm for organizing social reforms, and with his dogged courage in championing whatever cause his principles pointed out to him. The conviction that overpopulation was the root of economic ills—“the master evil”<sup>41</sup>—had been deeply impressed on him in the experience of his own earlier years.

Fortunately the story of Place’s life has been so well told by Mr. Graham Wallas<sup>42</sup> that a mere allusion to its outlines will suffice us here. He was born, in 1771, in a London private debtor’s prison. His father, the keeper of the prison, was a brutal,

<sup>40</sup> *The Trades’ Newspaper and Mechanics’ Weekly Journal*, Sunday, Sept. 11, 1825, in Place papers, Hendon, vol. 61, p. 52.

The *Morning Chronicle* article on Profits and Wages was signed F. P. and is acknowledged by Place (Place papers, vol. 61, p. 50). I have no other knowledge of *A Matrimonial Index* or of *Marrying Made Harmless*.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to Miss Martineau, Add. MSS. 35,149, f. 189 b.

<sup>42</sup> *The Life of Francis Place, 1771-1854*. London, 1898.

dissolute man, and an inveterate gambler, who frequently deserted his family and who, after making scant provision for his son's early education, in a passing fit of temper turned him over as apprentice to the master nearest at hand—a drunken maker of leather breeches. The boy, left to himself, spent his evenings in the low companionship of the streets. His marriage to a girl not yet seventeen years old, before he himself was twenty, proved the great moral influence of his life, and lifted him, smirched but not deeply stained, from the mire of his past surroundings. But marriage brought economic burdens also; and when, two years later, a strike left him, his wife, and his child on the wretched verge of starvation during eight months in which he could find no work, he passed through an acquaintance with misery that never faded from his mind, and colored all the economic opinions of his later career.

Gradually, by indomitable spirit and prodigious industry, Place worked himself upward, through various vicissitudes, to the position of a prosperous master tailor. In a room behind his shop at Charing Cross he had accumulated a remarkable library; and here, to consult his books and him, came many of the notable politicians and men of letters of the day. By the time he became prominent as a writer on population he was a man of fifty, already retired from business with a comfortable income, deeply versed in the economic and political views of the time, and exercising a quiet but far-reaching influence as an organizer of social reforms.

The population question had long interested him. In a letter of the year 1833<sup>43</sup> he writes:

My attention was called to the Principle of Population soon after Mr. Malthus published the first edition of his Essay and I have ever since been a careful observer of and a diligent enquirer into the habits and circumstances of the working people, and especially in regard to the consequences of population amongst them.

The conclusions he drew from his inquiries were fundamentally in accord with the orthodox economics. The excessive power of increase in mankind he held indisputable. The laboring classes were depressed by excess of numbers: only through better adjustment of numbers to the conditions of employment could they hope to rise. Conditions of employment in turn were limited by the amount of available capital. Except as additional capital

<sup>43</sup> To W. F. Lloyd, Add. MSS. 35,149, ff. 229-30.

could be accumulated and utilized, population must be kept down by the operation of some check; and, as Place wrote before the days of the propaganda, "the Messrs. Vice and Misery, of Malthus, is the only firm that can keep them down at all."<sup>44</sup>

The Malthusian recommendation of moral restraint, in the sense of long-delayed marriage, was in Place's eyes an utter absurdity. His own early marriage had been his salvation. He had failed to live decently in celibacy even to the age of nineteen: and, for the man of the laboring class who awaited assured means of supporting a family before taking a wife, the horror of this youthful experience foretold to him hopeless immorality. But experience no less emphatically warned him that early marriage meant many children. He himself, it is recorded,<sup>45</sup> was the father of fifteen, of whom five died in childhood. James Mill, who antedated him as a herald of neo-Malthusianism, had, while still struggling for a precarious living, nine children: "conduct than which nothing could be more opposed, both as a matter of good sense and of duty, to the opinions which, at least at a later period of his life, he strenuously upheld."<sup>46</sup> Small wonder, with Place's experience of discreet paternity, that he should write a little bitterly to Ensor<sup>47</sup> of "moral restraint, which has served so well in the instances of you & I—and Mill, and Wakefield—mustering among us no less I believe than 36 children—. . . rare fellows we to teach moral restraint."

So stood Place the reformer, between the devil of vice and the deep sea of misery, ready material for conversion to advocacy of the new form of preventive check.

The dawning idea of artificial restriction may conjecturally be dated from 1818—the year of James Mill's "Colony" article, and Owen's visit to France. The development of active propaganda was later: the date of Place's book and a statement in one of the handbills,<sup>48</sup> taken with other evidence,<sup>49</sup> suggest as

<sup>44</sup> Letter to G. Ensor, Jan. 18, 1818. Add. MSS. 35,153, f. 41.

<sup>45</sup> Wallas, *Life of Francis Place*, p. 38; and article: "Francis Place," in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. But on p. 194 of the *Life* the number is given as fourteen.

<sup>46</sup> J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Add. MSS. 35,153, f. 41.

<sup>48</sup> "Within the last two years, a more extensive knowledge of the process has prevailed. . . . ." (*To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life*.)

<sup>49</sup> Especially Carlyle's letter in *The History of the Diabolical Hand Bill*.



the most probable date the middle of 1822. Meantime the evidence shows that Place was seriously studying the subject. Critical notes on the 1817 edition of Malthus' "Essay", made in April, 1819, are among his papers.<sup>50</sup> In the early part of 1821 he had begun his "Illustrations and Proofs",<sup>51</sup> provoked by the "peevishness" and inconsequence of Godwin's senile "Enquiry."<sup>52</sup> "I will not", he said,<sup>53</sup> "follow Godwin's example, and do it in bad temper . . . I will treat both Godwin and Malthus as Gentlemen & Scholars, and will shew that I am not afraid of discovering the truth." He borrowed, through Ricardo, Malthus' own copy of the "Essay" of 1798.<sup>54</sup> But he was not content merely to arbitrate an old dispute, as is sufficiently attested by his resolute<sup>55</sup> inclusion of the epoch-marking chapter on "Means of Preventing the Numbers of Mankind from Increasing Faster than Food is Provided."

In 1822, with his book before a startled public, Place found himself committed to the policy he had thus announced.

From this time forward Place continually advanced the neo-Malthusian position in argument with every working-man whose confidence or gratitude he could earn, in every working-class newspaper that would admit his letters, and in his correspondence with private friends and public acquaintances. As a consequence his name, for twenty years, was hardly ever mentioned in print without some reference, deprecatory or abusive, to his notorious opinions. Good men refused to be introduced to him . . .<sup>56</sup>

In 1834 the committee of the Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge refused his aid in preparing tracts for the working people on the ground that "they ought to recollect what Mr. Place had written respecting Population and to take care not to identify the Society with him." The account in which Place has recorded this episode<sup>57</sup> clearly reflects the strong prejudice against him which then prevailed. Especially was this prejudice felt among certain factions of the working classes, for

<sup>50</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the Preface, p. xiii.

<sup>52</sup> *Of Population. An Enquiry concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind.* By William Godwin. London, 1820.

<sup>53</sup> In an "unsent" reply to W. H. Rosser's letter of Jan. 26, 1821. Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>54</sup> See a letter from Malthus dated Feb. 19, 1821. Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the introduction, p. xii.

<sup>56</sup> Wallas, *Life of Francis Place*, p. 169.

<sup>57</sup> Add. MSS. 35,154, ff. 185 *et seq.*

whose benefit Place believed he was acting. Cobbett was abusive. In particular he caricatured Place in the character of "Peter Thimble, Esq., a great Anti-Population Philosopher", who figures in Cobbett's diverting "comedy in three acts" entitled "Surplus Population."<sup>58</sup> Feargus O'Connor and Bron-terre O'Brien, among the Chartists, were hostile.<sup>59</sup> But all this Place had foreseen; he faced it deliberately. "I am well aware", he wrote, "of the obloquy any one must encounter who may explain the true bearings of the question. He must expose himself to many imputations, and this I am prepared to do."<sup>60</sup>

An audacious instance of his propagandism is afforded by copies<sup>61</sup> of letters addressed to clergymen who had testified before the Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, in 1824. One of these copies, marked with the names of Rev. John Pratt and Rev. Anthony Collett, is guarded in tone—ingratiatingly praising the knowledge displayed in the testimony, but expressing doubt of the practical outcome, and concluding with the assertion that "*The people alone can serve themselves*, and most assuredly they will do so when they shall come to understand the means."

To Rev. Dr. Goodwin, and to Rev. Philip Hunt, Place writes more unreservedly:

Sir

I have read your evidence before the "select committee of the House of Commons on Labourers Wages" — and have taken the liberty to forward a parcel to you. This I should not have done had you not appeared to me to be a good and a wise man. The evils of poverty, the evils of bastardy—the evils of the poor laws as you are compelled to administer them, and the consequent degradation of the Labouring people are lamentable, nay highly afflicting circumstances. One only remedy will ever be found, and that is checking the increase of population by physical means, time will work the remedy as proposed, when sufficiently known. It is doing so in many places where it has been made known, and the best consequences will no doubt follow.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup> London, n. d. (Probably 1823).

<sup>59</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*, s. v. "Place."

<sup>60</sup> From a fragment of MS. *Essays on the Principle of Population addressed to the Working Classes*, 1824, Vol. 68, Hendon. One or two errors of the original, in punctuation, etc., have not been transcribed.

<sup>61</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>62</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

Apparently of similar purpose is the following unaddressed draft of a letter already referred to<sup>63</sup> in another connection:

Sir:

By an account of your Parish laid before Parliament, I find a statement which has been copied into a newspaper which I inclose with this. It appears that a very great increase of people has taken place within the last 20 years and that the whole of the increase has been added to the paupers. A truly lamentable circumstance. If you will have the goodness to examine into the causes, and to think of the consequences of this terrible state of society you will not fail to discover, that no Legislative enactment can cure or even mitigate the evil, but that on the contrary, all such enactments must as they have hitherto done, continually increase it,—that every Legislative and *Parochial* interference, must inevitably still further degrade the people, that the more they are degraded; the less provident they will become, and that as their provident care diminishes so their numbers will increase, until wretchedness, and crime, ignorance and brutality shall make England a place not fit to live in. In order to do my part towards preventing such tremendous evils,—towards restoring a more prosperous and happier state of society, I have caused to be printed and have forwarded to you some bills, which however much they may revolt you on a first perusal, will I am sure on a serious consideration, be approved, and I hope be the means also, of preventing much evil.<sup>64</sup>

Other letters may be cited as indicating the progress of the propaganda. On September 1, 1824, Place wrote to the philanthropic Robert Gourlay: "Well my good friend, so you have become reasonable at last. I knew you would not hold out long when you came to reflect." And, after an argument from the analogy of emetics to prove "the proposal no more unnatural than medicine or surgery", he added: "You will be an advocate for it in another month or less."<sup>65</sup> From a different quarter, two weeks later, comes "Letter I. on Population and Wages; addressed to the Labouring Classes; by an Operative Weaver",<sup>66</sup> with similar resort to medical analogies, and persuasive use of other forms of appeal which suggest that the writer—W. Longson, of Manchester—was not only the correspondent but the disciple of Place. The spread of such doctrines in the industrial district of Lancashire is attested by the following report from the outposts:<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See above, p. 216.

<sup>64</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>65</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>66</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>67</sup> Vol. 61, Hendon, p. 60.

Bolton March 18th 1826.

Sir:

I received on monday last a parcel containing a quantity of Pamphlets calculated in my opinion to make an indelible impression on our *thinking* poor. As I could not mistake the object for which they were sent, have engaged a person (who travels through this country with *Sedition & Blasphemy*) to distribute them, I am happy to inform you that in the most poverty stricken districts, he has sold a large quantity of "*What is Love*" and he does not despair of the supply I furnished him with, having great effect in the same quarter.

In my own opinion nothing can be more plain, than the absolute necessity of the Anti-conception plan, and am happy to say that it is every day getting more popular . . . I can not but look upon the promoters of this measure, as persons who have deserved well of their country and hope to see the day when votes of thanks &c will be as common to them as to those who are supposed to have rendered the state eminent services in some other line.

A young man a friend of mine has promised to write an article on the subject, in order if possible to provoke discussion in the two Newspapers published in this town, which we conceive will be of great service to the cause . . . I assure you in my private circle no stone is left unturned to make my unfortunate countrymen sensible of the *crime* of bringing children into the world to be starved or cut off by disease &c . . .

My respects to Mr Carlile & family

And believe me

Yours very resptfy

Wm. Smith.<sup>68</sup>

Carlile's description of the handbills circulating "in thousands . . . throughout the populous districts of the North"<sup>69</sup> testifies that the work was thoroughly done.

In the periodical literature of the artificial check, particular interest attaches to a series of articles in the *Black Dwarf*. These began with the publication of Mrs. Fildes' letter to Carlile, in the issue for September 17, 1823,<sup>70</sup> under the caption "Practical Endeavours to Apply the System of Mr. Malthus in Checking Population", and included statements by Mr. Taylor and James Macphail, and Place's anonymous letter to the *Labourer's Friend*. Later, in fulfilment of the editor's promise to "take up the question of population", and "to try the various systems by

<sup>68</sup> In this as in some other citations, trivial errors of punctuation, etc., have occasionally been corrected when no reason appeared for retaining the original inaccuracy.

<sup>69</sup> *The Republican*, vol. xi, p. 555.

<sup>70</sup> Vol. xi, p. 404.

a little common sense", more substantial discussions were printed. The editorial position of the *Black Dwarf* merits especial attention: it was indicative of the radicalism of the period.

The *Dwarf* was hostile both to the form of check proposed and to the whole contention that a check was needed. He feared a letting down of the bars of morality:

I am not apt to startle at the ordinary cant about violating the laws of nature; but I am ready to confess that in the remedy proposed, I see a tendency to moral evils of the most aggravated description.<sup>71</sup>

He foresaw, too, what the propagandists did not see, that through power and experience of control, "modern refinement" might "be brought to consider child-bearing as the evil of all others to be avoided."<sup>72</sup> And after all, as he believed, no ground for restriction had been shown.

. . . if our population regulators had been the directors, the first couple would have left only a pair or two behind them, lest they should have perished for want of food.<sup>73</sup>

But instead, the course of history had demonstrated the adequacy of food supply. Unutilized abundance existed still. Thus the *Dwarf* fell back on the old fallacy which Malthus had somewhat overreached himself in discrediting: the inference that since some were well-off, all might be; and that, once given an equitable division, population might increase indefinitely and yet find the means of its own adequate support.

The truth is, that there is quite enough for all, if there were not a portion of society who are continually depriving others of their portion . . .<sup>74</sup>

The real evil is

No more, no less, than a *despotic government*, and a *rapacious church establishment*!<sup>75</sup>

The "preventive system" is accordingly unnecessary. Indeed, it is worse: it might prove a palliative! At this point the *Dwarf*, with splendid inconsistency, becomes a Malthusian:

The natural remedy for such a corrupt state of things, is the

<sup>71</sup> Vol. xi, p. 780.

<sup>72</sup> Vol. xi, p. 405.

<sup>73</sup> Vol. xii, p. 145.

<sup>74</sup> Vol. xi, p. 405.

<sup>75</sup> Vol. xi, p. 698.

INCREASE of population, even to the extreme of pressure against the means of subsistence; for . . . it is only by reducing [the multitude] to a state bordering on despair, that they will ever be induced to avenge their wrongs, or to claim their rights. . . .<sup>76</sup>

. . . We do not wish men to be comfortable, if they could be so for a period, under a *bad system*. . . .<sup>77</sup>

. . . so far from excess of population being the cause of the evil, it will be found to be the only effectual remedy.<sup>78</sup>

Closely similar views were at one time held by the arch-radical Richard Carlile, the story of whose conversion bears impressive tribute to the power of the propaganda. He first appears in the discussion as the writer of a letter to Place,<sup>79</sup> dated Dorchester Gaol, August 8, 1822, and referring to Place's recently issued book—the "Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population." Carlile was contemplating the preparation of an article on Population to be published in his paper, *The Republican*, and wrote for information. In particular he declared himself apprehensive lest the proposed preventive methods should encourage immorality by facilitating the concealment of illicit relations.

Place's reply<sup>80</sup> affords the most elaborate example of one of his characteristic arguments. So far as the lower classes are concerned, the dread of moral lapse is mere illusion. The virtue which might be jeopardized hardly exists: "there is no chastity among the absolutely poor", and not much in the ranks just higher; for the conditions of existence make it all but impossible. Overpopulation so crushes wages down that girls grow up in squalid poverty and men dare not marry. Then comes the supreme misery of prostitution, wasting the lives of its immediate victims, and perverting, in all whom it touches, the whole attitude of men to women. A remedy for overpopulation will not extinguish vice, but it will make attainable a larger measure of virtue.

In the same letter Place set about the work of winning Carlile to the cause.

. . . I shall . . . make a few remarks . . . not such as will convince you; that I do not even wish; but, such as I hope may tend to induce you to keep cogitating on the subject, that conviction

<sup>76</sup> Vol. xi, pp. 409-10.

<sup>77</sup> Vol. xi, p. 705.

<sup>78</sup> Vol. xi, p. 910.

<sup>79</sup> Place papers, vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>80</sup> Vol. 68, Hendon.

may arise from full examination. . . . I cannot for a moment doubt the result and I wish you would take the trouble to think the subject well, laying aside your feelings and attending only to Reason, Never mind, however painful or repugnant. If to understand the true situation of mankind it becomes necessary to go through a painful course, there is no remedy but to take it or to remain in ignorance.

As for the projected editorial:

I do not see that you are called upon to take up the subject of Population in your publication . . . If you think you can do no service, refrain, If you think you can be useful go on.

So Carlile refrained and cogitated. More than two years afterward he alludes, in *The Republican*, to his original abhorrence of the preventive measures, and to the friend who had brought about his change of mind.<sup>81</sup> The change was still incomplete—Carlile had become tolerant, but not enthusiastic:

I have not one word left to say against this proposed prudent check to the unhappy extension of numbers, where there are not the means to support them in comfort; but . . . I will not advocate it at present under the head of a great political principle.<sup>82</sup>

Like the *Black Dwarf*, Carlile remained confident that food was abundant,<sup>83</sup> and convinced that the chief source of evil resided in existing institutions. So he wrote:

I maintain . . . that bad government and a priesthood constitute the evil[s] which at present degrade the people of this country.<sup>84</sup>

And again:

. . . I will never complain of too many human beings, whilst all these removeable evils exist.<sup>85</sup>

But another half year saw him wholly won over. *The Republican* for May 6, 1825, contained under the title "What is Love?" an article in which Carlile's spirit of reform turned to the problem of sex; and in which, "after three years of consideration; after passing a year with a feeling almost like dread of giving

<sup>81</sup> *Republican*, vol. x, pp. 496-97.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 588.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 755.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591.

it thought",<sup>86</sup> he declared himself an advocate of the plan of the propagandists—"the last of a multitude of converts to the utility and importance of the measure."<sup>87</sup> His article, with modifications, was reprinted in February, 1826,<sup>88</sup> as "Every Woman's Book" and went through repeated editions. Fifteen hundred copies were exhausted in a few weeks.<sup>89</sup> Eight months after its publication it had "sold in its various editions to the extent of five thousand copies, with a continuing demand."<sup>90</sup>

The popularity of the book was derisively attributed by its author to the abuse which Cobbett poured upon it. "Unintentionally or intentionally", wrote Carlile, "Cobbett has raised a demand . . . even in Wales";<sup>91</sup> and more specifically: "The effect which Cobbett has produced with regard to this book has been to create a call for about fifty per day."<sup>92</sup> Cobbett's denunciation of both book and author was indeed violent.<sup>93</sup> Nor is this surprising, for Carlile's fanatic and brazen hostility to what he called prejudice had here carried him outrageous lengths beyond the opinions held by Place and the saner members of the propaganda. Yet there is no occasion to question the oft-asserted sincerity of purpose which had produced the book. More and more Carlile became convinced of his full justification,<sup>94</sup> until he could say:

After years of consideration, and three years of clamour against it, I now and forever stake my moral reputation upon the character of that book and will stand or fall with it in public opinion. I will endeavour to be otherwise useful; but I have no desire to be known to posterity in a higher character than that of being the sole and unassisted author of "EVERY WOMAN'S BOOK."<sup>95</sup>

The voice of disapproval was heard outside of England and called forth in America a pamphlet which has linked this early propagandism with the neo-Malthusian movement of more recent years. Robert Dale Owen had been publicly assailed, in New

<sup>86</sup> Vol. xi, 556.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 563.

<sup>88</sup> Vol. xiii, p. 200.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>90</sup> Vol. xiv, p. 443.

<sup>91</sup> Vol. xiii, p. 513.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>93</sup> See especially *Cobbett's Weekly Register*, April 15, 1826.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *The Lion*, vol. ii, p. 420.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.



York, for approving "Every Woman's Book." That he admired Carlile's courage he admitted; but he denied any admiration for the tone of the work.<sup>96</sup> To make his position clear he embodied it in a book of his own—the well-known "Moral Physiology", which, first published in New York in December, 1830, reached its fifth edition by the middle of 1831, and appeared in both authorized and unauthorized English editions in 1832.<sup>97</sup>

"Moral Physiology" was not only incomparably superior to "Every Woman's Book" in moderation of manner, singleness of aim, correctness of information, and the manifest evidence of its philanthropic purpose; it was at the same time quite the most elaborate treatise on the new check which had appeared. Place at once adopted it for the furtherance of his views. As it happened, Miss Harriet Martineau was at that time busy putting up orthodox economics in those curious pellets which she called "Illustrations of Political Economy." Through her friend, W. J. Fox, she appealed to Place for information on the combination laws and the condition of workingmen.<sup>98</sup> Place seized the opportunity to send her a copy of "Moral Physiology", with a long and remarkably frank letter criticizing her interpretation of Malthusianism and urging his own.<sup>99</sup> Ten years of propagandism had somewhat rebuffed his hopes that his recommendations would be universally adopted, but he remained convinced of their efficacy. In a similar spirit, a year later, he sent "Moral Physiology" to W. F. Lloyd, Professor of Political Economy at Oxford, and author of "Two Lectures on the Checks to Population." In the anonymous letter which he wrote on this occasion he remarked:

Whether abstaining from propagating under undesirable circumstances will ever become general is doubtful, but the practice has been adopted as well by some of the working people as by persons who live genteel lives on narrow incomes, and it is increasing.<sup>100</sup>

\* Preface to *Moral Physiology*.

\* The date of *Moral Physiology* is differently stated, but most of the reference books give it as 1831. December, 1830, seems to be indicated as the correct date by a remark in the appendix to the 5th edition, where Owen, under date of June 25, 1831, states that "seven months have not yet elapsed since the first publication of *Moral Physiology*." Concerning the English editions, see a statement by R. D. O. in the *Crisis* for October 27, 1832.

\* Add. MSS. 35,149, f. 145.

\* *Ibid.*, ff. 189b-192.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, ff. 229-230.

From this time on, so far as available records show, the activity of the propaganda slackened. The death of Malthus and the Poor Law Amendment removed almost simultaneously, in 1834, the personal figure about which population controversy had so long ranged itself, and the aggravated economic problem which had given concern alike to Malthus and to the followers whose half-alien opinions he had inspired. Other economic reforms crowded on the popular attention. Whatever may be the adequate explanation, radical proposals for the restriction of births almost ceased, until their spectacular revival nearly fifty years later. The cessation was not quite complete. Two new books, which attained subsequent notoriety in the neo-Malthusian movement, were put forth: Dr. Knowlton's "Fruits of Philosophy", published in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1833, and Dr. George Drysdale's "Elements of Social Science", published in London, in 1854.<sup>101</sup> Occasional allusions of hostile writers also showed that at least the memory of the propaganda was not dead.<sup>102</sup>

The movement had been no mere ruffling of the surface of contemporary thought. Eminent men had accepted its doctrines as an organic part of their philosophy. Wooler, in 1823, had found "men of rank and talent advocating them openly, in theory."<sup>103</sup> Cobbett identified the propaganda with the Westminster "Rump."<sup>104</sup> The Benjamin Aimé handbill had implicated "many medical men of the first rank." Carlile tells us more:

In London, there is a sort of class, or society or connection of persons, composed of Physicians, Literati, Political Economists, Members of Parliament, with men and *women* of the first rank in point of fortunes and titles, so convinced of a redundancy of population, as to recommend a means of preventing conception . . .<sup>105</sup>  
 . . . I see the best and most wise of men labouring with a zeal to promulgate secretly a knowledge of this plan.<sup>106</sup>  
 . . . The men, who have been instrumental in making this matter known in this country, are all elderly men, fathers of families of children grown up to be men and women, and men of first rate moral

<sup>101</sup> Dr. Charles R. Drysdale mentions (*Life and Writings of Thomas R. Malthus*, p. 113) *Large and Small Families*, by Austin Holyoake, as another tract of that period.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Hickson, in the *Westminster Review*, vol. lii, p. 141 (October, 1849); and Rickards, *Population and Capital* (1854), p. 194.

<sup>103</sup> J. E. Taylor, *To the Public*, p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> *Weekly Register*, vol. liv., col. 108, and vol. lviii., col. 419.

<sup>105</sup> *Republican*, vol. x, p. 496.

<sup>106</sup> Vol. xi, p. 555.

characters, of first rate learning, and some of the first politicians and philosophers that ever lived in this or in any other country: men, who are known, as above described, in almost every country in Europe and America. . . .<sup>107</sup>

It is supposed, that the very Cabinet is acquainted with, and favourable to, this anti-conception scheme; from the quality and connections of the persons who are its advocates.<sup>108</sup>

The probable fact is, as these statements imply, that the centre of the propaganda was the Benthamite group, of which Place was an influential member. According to Wallas, "the rest of the inner circle of Benthamites seem to have shared Place's opinion, though he alone faced the public scandal."<sup>109</sup> Grote is known to have presented "The Fruits of Philosophy" to the library of London University.<sup>110</sup> As for Bentham himself, both his attitude and his caution are evinced in a letter to Place, touching a certain person's disapproval of Place's anti-population activities:

. . . As to the point in question, I took care not to let him know how my opinion stood; the fat would have been all in the fire, unless I succeeded in convincing him, for which there was no time . . .<sup>111</sup>

James Mill's prominent connection with the propaganda is clear alike from his own early allusions to preventive methods and from the influence of his economic theories upon the arguments of the other anti-populationists: an influence which became unmistakable—was, in fact, expressly acknowledged—in the communications of "A.Z." and "A.M." to the *Black Dwarf's* discussion.<sup>112</sup> Indeed "A.M." is so like Mill in style as well as doctrine that but for his laudatory allusion to the master one might hazard a suspicion of their identity.

The case of John Stuart Mill has attained some notoriety. Immediately after Mill's death Mr. Abraham Hayward published in *The Times* a malevolent review of his life, and presently put a still more offensive account in private circulation. In this Mr. Hayward asserts that Mill

<sup>107</sup> Vol. xi, p. 564.

<sup>108</sup> Vol. x, p. 497.

<sup>109</sup> *Life of Place*, p. 169, note.

<sup>110</sup> J. M. Robertson, in *University Magazine and Free Review*, vol. ix, p. 16—following Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's *Life of Bradlaugh*, vol. ii, p. 16, note.

<sup>111</sup> Bentham to Place, April 24, 1831. *Life of Place*, p. 82.

<sup>112</sup> See especially vol. xi, p. 665, and vol. xii, p. 238.

. . . fell under the notice of the police by circulating copies of "What is Love?" and flinging down the areas of houses, for the edification of the maid-servants, printed papers or broad-sheets containing [a description of preventive measures]. Nor was this a repented error of his youth. It was the persistent error of his mature years, and not long since he was still making converts to the same theory . . .<sup>113</sup>

Mr. Christie, who replied to Hayward, does not believe that John Stuart Mill in later life persisted in his father's views on the limiting of population.<sup>114</sup> Holyoake relates that Mill once sent him "a passionate repudiation of concurrence or recommendation in any form, of methods imputed to him."<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, Mill's "Principles of Political Economy", though without overt allusion to artifice, unmistakably inculcates the duty of parents to keep the size of families within the limits of the means of adequate support. The spirit of this book, and of some of the recently published letters,<sup>116</sup> is far from suggesting any violent reaction from the youthful course which Christie himself admits:

. . . it is an undeniable fact that Mr. Mill, early in life, not when he was past twenty, but when he was seventeen, was, in company with some others, interfered with by the police for distribution of papers in promotion of a scheme for artificially checking the increase of population. He was not himself distributing, but one of his companions was with his knowledge.<sup>117</sup>

Mill was seventeen in the days of the Diabolical Handbill. Perhaps the occasion of this brush with the police was that same affair which the *Trades' Newspaper* described, when "certain young gentlemen" were "dragged . . . before a Magistrate."<sup>118</sup> Beyond much doubt John Stuart Mill played at least a passive part in the handbill propaganda.

Whether or not Ricardo stood with Bentham and the Mills is not clear. His "Political Economy" was formulated and in print before Owen went to France or the "Colony" article was

<sup>113</sup>W. D. Christie, *John Stuart Mill and Mr. Abraham Hayward*, Q. C. (London, 1873) p. 8.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>115</sup>G. J. Holyoake, *Bygones worth Remembering*, vol. i, p. 270. Holyoake, however, has elsewhere shown himself untrustworthy on this subject of the artificial check and its advocates.

<sup>116</sup>Hugh S. R. Elliot, *The Letters of John Stuart Mill*, London, 1910.

<sup>117</sup>Christie, *op. cit.* p. 9.

<sup>118</sup>Cf. above, p. 219.

published; and he died a month before the handbill was made public by the *Black Dwarf*. But he was the friend of James Mill and of Place. Only a few weeks before his death his declaration in the House of Commons that "the welfare of the working people mainly depended upon themselves" was caught up by Place as a "most important truth" and sent out, with a handbill, as a propagandist argument.<sup>119</sup> One hesitates to take seriously the jocose remark of Booth, to the effect that the decrease of births in Ireland,

. . . if not allowed to be miraculous, can be accounted for only upon the supposition, that some Radical Economist has been lecturing at Portarlington on the subject of procreation . . .<sup>120</sup>

We may but conjecture whether to count Ricardo among the conservatives like Malthus and McCulloch, or to class him with his immediate disciples as an adherent of the principle of artificial restraint.

It was by fixing their attention on the principle of utility, as James Mill had counseled them, that these serious-minded reformers arrived at the conclusions which have here been described. They judged of utility with outlook narrowed to the measure of the orthodox economics of their day: an incipient wages-fund theory which meted out destruction to the laboring class in the simple, harsh ratio of its numbers. And if, out of the experience of Place or the coarseness of Carlile, it was suggested that parenthood was obedience to natural principles as well as conformity with rules of economic demand, the result was to enlarge the concept of utility by an idea of marriage debased to the level of a segregative moral police. Once, indeed, Place indulged in a vision of a higher position of woman, irradiating society with new influence for good;<sup>121</sup> and in due time a grosser reflection of this ideal showed in Carlile's work<sup>122</sup>—all to be the result of a reduction in the number of births. But mostly utility was the simple, grim avoidance of Malthusian misery and vice.

The same narrowness of outlook failed to reveal the disad-

<sup>119</sup> Letter to the editor of the *Labourer's Friend*, 12 July, 1823, Place MSS., vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>120</sup> *Letter to Malthus*, p. 122.

<sup>121</sup> Letter to Carlile, Aug. 17, 1822. Vol. 68, Hendon.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. especially the Dedication of vol. xi of *The Republican*.

vantages of the restrictive plan. Place believed the aggregate of vice would be reduced. Carlile could not see that "Every Woman's Book" had opened the way for "a particle of new evil."<sup>123</sup> Save for the warning voice of the *Black Dwarf* the conviction prevailed that reduction of numbers could never be carried too far among the working classes—that is, too far to suit the needs of industry. The concentration of preventive practices in those classes where economic wants press less heavily was an anomaly hardly to be foreseen.

Apprehension of the menace of unequal increase of the different social ranks first became serious when evolutionary biology had pointed out the significance of hereditary differences in human ability. In the decade of the twenties such differences were all but unrecognized, and the selective improvement of types through stress of numbers was unknown. For Place and his contemporaries there was no fear of degeneracy, following the abatement of natural selection, as comforts increase—no thought of "race suicide" and the decline of nations which die at the top. "Laws of nature" connoted traditional prejudice. Against such laws Place championed Bentham's principle of utility as alone suited for the guidance of mankind. His argument that "Nature is a blind, dirty old toad"<sup>124</sup> revealed an almost dramatic unconsciousness of the coming reaction in population theory.

The morality of neo-Malthusianism, according to other than utilitarian standards, is not for discussion here. But the whole subject merits discussion more far-sighted and enlightened than it has yet received. For the history of the neo-Malthusian movement impels one to believe that beneath the manifest abuses of the radical check, and beyond the vision of most of those who have been its supporters, is the ideal of a larger result—a striving for better adjustment between the momentary exactions of economic civilization and the more fundamental conditions of the continuity of human life. The propaganda came into existence at a time when the need for such adjustment was severe. Both the proposal and the revival of artificial restraint were due to able men, overradical, perhaps, but indubitably earnest in the popular cause. In less than a hundred years—rather, indeed, in about thirty—and despite all opposition, preventive practices have diffused themselves through most of the advanced nations of the world. A

<sup>123</sup> *The Lion*, vol. ii, p. 422.

<sup>124</sup> Letter to Carlile, vol. 68, Hendon.

movement with such auspices and such vitality, and with consequences so mingled, good and bad, forces itself upon us as a social problem which can hardly be solved by the protestations of persons who turn their faces away from a situation they have not ventured to understand.